

Reissue CDs Weekly: Lush

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By Kieron Tyler

The news that Lush have reformed didn't come as surprise. Their comparable contemporaries Ride and Slowdive had also done so over the past couple of years, and My Bloody Valentine – an influence looming over all three – returned in 2007 after over a decade's absence. Unlike the others, Lush, who were on 4AD rather than Creation, have reissued their complete catalogue as a box set during the run-up to re-hitting stages next May. **Chorus** has the potential to eclipse the reappearance as it doesn't edit history like a one-or-so hour live concert.

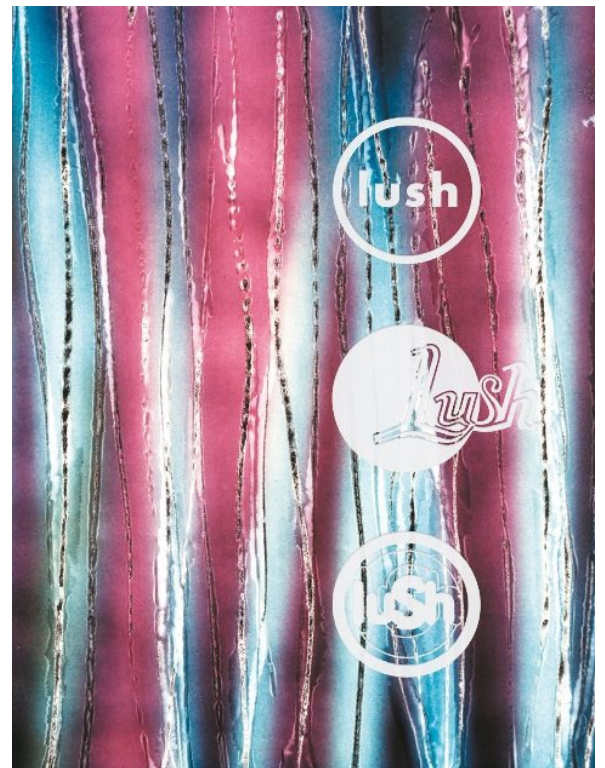
With Lush, editing is probably necessary to make a coherent musical statement. Up to 1994 they were, broadly, shoegazers. Then, from the early 1996 single "Single Girl" until their officially announced split in 1998, they abandoned the impressionistic for straightforward Britpop-like pop. Sudden shifts of style weren't atypical in the new, post-Oasis commercial environment: Ride became rockier from 1994, a process culminating in the clod-hopping *Tarantula* album. Lush's change in musical direction brought chart success. Up to "Single Girl", their singles had scraped the lower reaches of the charts. Afterwards, they went Top 30.

Over its five CDs, *Chorus* – presumably named after the guitar effect – tells the full story in terms of the music. Surprisingly, there is no essay so the tale overall is not told. Why the Britpop era effectively turned Lush into another band is, unfortunately, not explained. A case-bound, book-style set, *Chorus* is a lovely object and looks like a classic 4AD release. The three albums proper, *Spooky* (1992), *Split* (1994) and *Lovelife* (1996) are bookended by the two compilations *Gala* (1990) and *Topolino* (1996). With an album per disc, the bonus tracks on each include demos, radio sessions, non-album tracks and compilation appearances. The annotation does not include details of the original release of the previously issued bonuses, and this oversight renders it impossible to relate non-album tracks to their original parent album, single, EP or compilation album.

Matters are further complicated when the band's story overall is pondered. Despite ostensibly being "hullo clouds, hullo sky" shoegazers, they had no problems with out-and-out pop: early on, they covered ABBA's "Hey Hey Helen". They signed with 4AD. The label's brightest stars had been [Cocteau Twins](#), whose Robin Guthrie was their producer from 1989 to 1991. Lush's sonic architecture overtly reflected that of Cocteau Twins. Lush changed bass players mid-stream when Steve Rippon was replaced by Phil King. The band's song-writing frontline, Emma Anderson and Miki Berenyi, were ubiquitous London scenesters and music press coverage of their exploits distracted attention from the music. Most awfully, their drummer Chris Acland committed suicide in late 1996. The band never played again after that, and the split was announced in 1998.

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What is left, with *Chorus*, is the music. At their best, on Discs One and Two, Lush were – and still sound – fantastic. They dealt in a rock-grounded shoegazing. The vocals were wraithlike and the guitars shimmered but the drums and bass had the forward motion of a band which wanted audiences to move. Everything, bar a couple of remixes, on the first two discs needs to be heard.



With *Disc Three* and *Split* things are less balanced. King is on board and Guthrie is no longer their producer. The songs are as good as before, but a more direct production removes the music's former inscrutability. As for the unambitious Britpop-inspired *Lovelife*, as Miss Jean Brodie said, "For those who like that sort of thing, that is the sort of thing they like."

Chorus amply demonstrates that Lush was a musical game of two halves. From the perspective of now, their earlier, more sensitive material resonates most as it did not react to a sudden trend and has a greater depth. But this was not how they reached their commercial peak. Newly recorded material will be issued to accompany the reformation. It will be fascinating to see which of the two, virtually irreconcilable, versions of the old Lush wins through next year and which bubbles up on the new material. Only then will Lush reveal how they would like to be seen.

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